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THE MUNDAKA UPANISAD

transcreated from Sanskrit by P. Lal





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to Śhyāmaśree at whose request this transcreation was begun and completed in Puri m May 1997



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What an Upanisad! Relentless and ceaseless in its pure idealism, concerned only with the thought-to-be-impossible Transcendental Divinity, the beyond-even-Brahman experience of Tat-Sat, That Which Is, the Mundaka suggests that all ritualistic practice is futile if its aim is to achieve an experience of the Ultimate Truth.

All work fetters. Good deeds fetter us to a temporary heaver, ill deeds to a temporary hell. Heaven is a brief punishment for reward-seeking virtue; hell a brief punishment for the selfishness of vice. Punishment term over, one returns to the world of karma and samsara, the messy entangling round of birth and re-birth.

Only meditation, Ātman-knowledge, seeking Truth for its own sake, like a flower that enjoys the air it breathes, provides the coordinates that spell the freedom variously described as mokşa, mukti, liberation, salvation, sāntih, the peace that passeth understanding, the ineffable vision, perhaps satori, may be nirvāna (nibbāna), surely paradiso.

Raja Rammohun Roy translated this Upanişad in 1819. In his brief, brilliant introduction he made clear the central advice of the "Moonduk Opunishud": "the observance of idolatrous rites can never be productive of eternal heatings." Even more important, however, is the confidence of the seer who composed the Mundaka that "eternal beatitude" is not only possible but also the only desirable goal for a human being to seek and pursue. The Upanisad is categorical in its condemnation of those who reject this goal and those who seek it through rites and rituals in the rat-race loaded with desire; they are "utterly stupid": pramidshib.

All

The Mundaka Upanisad

2

FIRST MUNDAKA

Canto 1

Brahmā was the first god

He is the Creator of the universe

he is its supporter.

The source of all knowledge is Brahmā-knowledge.

This knowledge was imparted by Brahmā

In the distant past

the knowledge Brahmā gave Atharvā was passed by Atharvā to Añgira.

Añgira passed ît to Satyavaha of the line of Bharadvāja.

And Satyavaha passed this knowledge

to Angirasa. The knowledge was transmitted

> from senior to junior from higher to lower.

3 The mahā-householder Śaunaka approached Añgirasa in the prescribed manner and asked,

"Divinely learned one, what is that, knowing which, all this becomes known?"

- 4 He replied, "Brahmā-knowers say there are two kinds of knowledge: the Beyond and the not-beyond, the Absolute and the relative, the Spiritual and the secular.
- 5 The not-beyond consists of the Rg-veda, the Yajur-veda, the Sāma-veda and the Atharvaveda, sixsā-phonetics, kalpa-rituals, ryākarpāgrammar, chanda-prosody. jyatsa-astrology. The Beyond teaches that which never decays.

6 The invisible

ungraspable
sourceless
formles
without eyes and cars
without hands and leet
eternal
all-pervading
everywhere-moving
subtlest of the subtle
undecaying
the source of all creation—

That

the wise see everywhere.

7 The spider spins out a web and secretes it back into itself

> The earth grows grass and trees Humans emanate hair

From the Undecaying emerges this universe.

8 Brahmā creates

through the discipline of tapas

From that

is born the potent seed of food

From that seed

comes the life-breath prana

From that prana

comes the cosmic mind manah

From manah

comes that-which-is salva

From satva

come all the worlds

From the worlds

comes karma

From That evolves all this:

From karma

comes non-death

the immortality called amrta.

9 From That

who knows all in totality and knows all in detail

whose knowledge is the product

of the creative discipline of tapas

name

form

food.

OF THE FIRST MUNDAKA

FIRST MUNDAKA

Canto 2

I The Truth That Is is this:

Wise poets saw many karmas mentioned in the mantras of the three Vedas.

If you seek rewards

then perform those karmas

This is the way for those who do good deeds

2 Light the fire and when the flames shoot up

pour the oblations
between the two sides of the fire.

3 If you perform

the Agnihotra sacrifice without the rituals

of Darsa

Paurnamāsa

Caturmāsya

and Ägrayana

and without inviting guests

If you do not pour oblations at the right time

If the Vaiśvadeva ritual

is missing

Then the sacrifice is vitiated The performer loses all the seven worlds.

Kālī Karālī Manojavā

Sulohitā Sudhūmravrnā

Sphulingini and devi Viśvaruci-

these are the flickering

Black Terrible Mind-Swift

seven tongues of fire: Bright-Red Thick-Smoke-Coloured Shooting-Sparks and Multi-Rayed.

5 These oblations become

the rays of the sun

and lifting the perfect performer

they carry him where

the lord of the gods lives above everyone else

"Come! Come!" they say

"This is the Brahmaloka

the heaven

which your good deeds have earned."

With these sweet words

and with adoring respect

the flickering oblations transport the sacrificer

along the path of the rays of the sun

7 Eighteen people are needed

for this sacrifice:

the performer

his wife

and sixteen Brahmins

It is a fragile raft.

As mentioned earlier,

this is inferior karma

The fools

who praise this as superior suffer old age and death again and again

8 Enveloped in non-knowledge smothered, in avidyā

> these fools think they are pandits they think they are wise

They stumble again and again like the blind led by the blind.

9 Misled by non-knowledge in so many ways they are like children.

> They pride themselves saying "We are so successful!"

> > They are lost

in attachment to rituals

and do not realise it.

They enjoy a brief heaven,

and then it ends-

and they are grief-stricken.

10 They are utterly stupid
They think ritual sacrifices and charities

are the best things to do.

They know nothing better.

They enjoy the fruits of good deeds

in a brief heaven

and return to this world

or to something even worse.

11 There are others

12

the screne and wise ones

who live on alms in forests

They are the ones who practise tapasyā and śraddhā

who are pure-minded

They pass through the door of the sun

and attain the realm of ampta the abode of the undecaying Ätman the realm of the Spirit Purusa.

The Brahman-seeker examines

the worlds attained by karma.

The Brahman-seeker practises

detachment from karma.

Brahman is not created by karma

and cannot be attained by karma.

With sacred dry wood in his hands

the Brahman-seeker

13 He goes to the wise one

whose mind is calm

whose senses are disciplined

He goes to him to know

the truth of the undecaying Purusa the truth of Brahman-knowledge Brahma-vidyā as it really is.

HERE ENDS THE SECOND CANTO OF THE FIRST MUNDAKA

0

SECOND MUŅDAKA

Canto 1

The Truth That Is is this

O Somya

From a blazing fire

thousands of fiery sparks-

So from the Aksara

the Undecaying One

swarms of creatures

and then dissolve into it

2 This divine Purusa

is radiant

without form

present outside and inside without prāṇa-breath

without mind

pure and higher even

than that

which is higher than Aksara

the Undecaying One

the Primal Syllable.

```
From it
             emerge
             prāna-breath
             manak-mind
             the sense-organs
             space
             air
             fire
            water
            and the all-supporting earth.
4
     Its head
            is heaven
     Its eyes
            the moon and the sun
     Its ears
            the directions
     Its speech
            the Vedas
     Its prāņa-breath
            the wind
     Its heart
            the universe
     Its feet
            the earth
     It is
            the innermost Atman
    of all creatures-
```

sarva-bhūta-antarātmā.

5 From it

comes the fire

that fuels the sun

From the moon

is born the Parjanya-cloud

bringing rain

From the rain

comes the lush vegetation

of earth

From males

comes the semen inserted in females

From Purusa

comes the teeming variety
of life.

6 From it

come the Rg, Sāma and Yajur-vedas

From it dikṣā-initiation

all *yajītas*

animal sacrifices

dakṣiṇā-offerings the period of a ritual

the ritual-performer

the worlds

purified by the moon

and the worlds

of the sun

7 From it

come the various gods
the Sādhyas
human beings
animals and birds
prāṇa-breath and apāṇa-outbreath
paddy and wheat
tapasyā and śraddhā
truth and brahmacarya
and codes of conduct

8 From it

two eyes

two ears

From it

the corresponding sense-perceptions the objects perceived the seven states of consciousness the seven seats of the seven organs

The sense-organs stray

when not asleep in the cave of the heart.

9 From it

come the oceans and mountains

From it

From it

come all the trees and plants

From it

every rasa

every juice

every essence

It exists

the Innermost Self

the antarātmā

surrounded by the multitudinosity

O Somya! This very Purusa is the universe, the cosmos. It is karma, it is tapas, it is the supreme Brahman, deathless, paramrtam. Who sees it hidden in the cave of the heart, he, in this world itself, breaks the bond of non-knowledge.

HERE ENDS THE FIRST CANTO OF THE SECOND MUNDAKA

0

SECOND MUNDAKA

Canto 2

I Self-shining

seated in the heart moving in the heart

the great support-

It vitalises

whatever moves

whatever is alive whatever blinks

whatever is.

Τt

is what is and what is not

sat and asat

It is the Adorable One

beyond all analyais

most precious of all

most worth knowing.

Radiant

smaller than the smallest support of the worlds and their dwellers

the undecaying Brahman

Ιt

2

is *prāṇa*-breath

väk-speech and manah-mind

satya-truth amṛta-non-death.

O Somya

strive to know it penetrating its essence.

3 The Upanisads are the great bow Meditation is the arrow—

Lift the bow, Somya!

Pull the string tight!

Aim! Fix your mind on the target;

It—the Undecaying One. Shoot!

4 Aum is the bow

The atman is the arrow Brahman is the target—

Make no mistake!

Shoot at the target!

Shoot till the arrow And the target are one!

Strive to know only that Atman

which fuses into one heaven and earth and inter-space and mind and all the prāna-breaths.

Stop talking about other things!

This is the bridge

to non-death

6 The spokes of a chariot wheel unite in the hub The veins of the body

unite in the heart

The multi-formed Ätman

is One within

It is Aum.

Meditate on it

if you seek to go beyond darkness.

Vāh svasti!

May all go well with you!

That

7

which knows all in totality

and in detail

That

whose glory shines

in all the world

That

is the Atman

It dwells

in the radiant space of Brahman

Brahma-pure

the city of the heart.

Leader of prana-breath and the body

manifested in the mind

it rests in the heart surrounded by the body.

The wise know

they are one with it-

They know it

as ānanda-rūpam-amṛtam
the full-bliss-form of non-death.

8 When that One

is seen as far and near high and low cause and effect one's heart-knots are loosened one's karma is wiped out.

9 The Light of lights
The Seamless One
The Pure One
Sheathed in the shining
golden space of the heart—
Those who know the Atman
Know that this is on

10 No sun shines there, no moon,
no stars, no lightning.
How does it dazzle then?
By its own light.
When it shines, everything shines.
By its light shines everything.

HERE ENDS THE SECOND CANTO
OF THE SECOND MUNDAKA

0

THIRD MUNDAKA

Canto 1

I Two lovely-feathered birds

always sit together

on the same tree.

One eats

the pippala fruit.

The other

does not eat.

It only watches,

2 Ignorant

the Purusa sits on the same tree and grieves.

But when it sees

the other

the glorious other

it grieves no more.

3 When you see

the Supreme Purusa

the Absolute Divine

the Golden-Coloured One

the Creator of creators the Womb-of-Brahma

yon go beyond

punya-pāpa

virtue-and-vice

you become pure
you become serene
you achieve oneness.

4 It is the prana

the life-breath

of all creatures.

Who knows it

does not talk of anything

but

Such a person delights in the innocent joy

of the Atman.

Such a person

is forever fulfilled with Ätman-playfulness.

Such a person

is the finest

of Brahman-knowers.

f This-

the Radiant One

the Pure One , the \bar{A} tman within

the body hidden

always hidden

is seen by ascetics

who practise brahmacarya and truth and tapasyā.

6 Satyam eva jayate:

Truth alone triumphs,

never untruth.

The open road

to the gods

is truth

Only rsis who renounce

which is Truth

7 It is immense

divine

radiant

beyond thought

subtler than the subtlest

farther than the furthest but very near too

It resides

in the cave

of the heart

8 It

cannot be seen

cannot be described

not by speech

not by any other means

not by tapasyā

not by karma.

Only

when one is blessed

by the grace of wisdom

only then

by meditation

can one see

this Seamless One this Indivisible One.

9 The five-fold prana-breath

is spread

everywhere in the body.

So also

the subtle Atman

that is known by the mind.

It permeates

the perception and pranu of all creatures.

When the mind is pure

the Ātman

10 The pure-minded get

whatever worlds are desired

whatever joys are wished for Anyone seeking one's own welfare

HERE ENDS THE FIRST CANTO
OF THE THIRD MUNDAKA

respects such an Atman-knower.

رم

THIRD MUNDAKA

Canto 2

The person who knows

this Supreme Brahman which is pure which is radiant-

which sustains the universe

Such a person

is revered by the wise

who have discarded kāma.

These are the wise

who transcend the seed

and are not born again

who is propelled by desire

to seek desirable objects gets re-born to achieve those desires

But a person

2 A person

> who feels he has no desires for his desires are all fulfilled-

such a person

is Self-sufficient

such a person

is Atman-fulfilled.

3 This Atman

is not attained

by religious discourses

It is not attained

by intellectual excellence

It is not attained

by listening to revelations

This Atman

reveals its true nature

only to the person

who seeks its true nature.

4 This Atman

is not attained

by those who lack strength

nor by those

who are lost

ın self-delusion

nor by those who m

who merely work

but do not renounce

But the person

who uses these methods

and strives assiduously

enters the Atman

the Brahma-dhāma

the Abode of Brahman

5 Knowledge-fulfilled rsis

Self-sufficient

7

Ātman-fulfilled
Free from attachments
Serenely happy—
These wise persons
Seeing everywhere
The all-pervading One
Are united with the Ātman

Those who have striven
And grasped the truths
Of the Vedānta wisdom
By the yoga of renunciation—
They attain paramrta

And enter the All

The non-death felicity
In the realm of Brahman—
They are the free ones.

Then the fifteen parts of the body:

pråna
sraddha
akkira-space
väyu-arr
yyoti-fire
ap-ware
pythyri-earth
the senses
mind
food

strength

tapas

yajñas , the worlds—

return to their source.

The organs

return to their respective deities.

The karmas

together with the Atman

manifested as mind

become one

with the Undecaying

Beyond-All

Transcendent One.

8 The flowing rivers

of many names and forms

discarding names and forms

submerge and merge

in the depths of the ocean. Similarly,

when the Highest of all

the Radiant Purusa

is realised.

name and form vanish

9 Whoever knows

that Brahman

the Supreme One

becomes

that Brahman

the Supreme One.

None in his family

is born

without Brahman-knowledge.

He crosses over grief.

He transcends

vice and demerit.

Freed from the knots

that hind

the cave of the heart

he relishes

amṛta

the nectar of non-death

10 This is the word

of the sacred texts:

Impart Brahma-vidyā

only to the person

who practises the duties

described in the sacred texts

who studies the sacred texts

with the required śraddhā

who performs the Ekarsi ritual

who carries fire on his head

as enjoined in the Veda. . . .

11 In the distant past

the rsi Angiras

taught this truth.

Those who refrain

from the rites

and the disciplines

are unfit for the study

of the truths

of this text.
To the supreme rsis

we offer obeisance.

Namah!

To the supreme 1515

we offer obeisance.

Namah!

HERE ENDS THE SECOND CANTO OF THE THIRD MUNDAKA

May the gods grant that we hear only the good May the gods grant that we see only the good May we with steady mind and boody praise the Divine May the gods grant

رم رم

śantih śantih śantih

that we live in peace. . .

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